old friends becoming new by androgynousmikewheeler

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Summary:

As high school begins, Lucas rekindles his friendship with Joey Kim, short-lived member of the Hawkins AV Club. But maybe the feelings appearing are more than just friendship.

1. Chapter 1

Third period. The first day of freshman year. Lucas heads out of the locker room towards the gym. He's got his head down, quieter without Mike and Dustin, scheduled to the other boys' physical education class.

"Lucas?" a voice calls, familiar if somewhat deeper than he remembers.

He looks up from the linoleum hallway to see Joey Kim, taller, with longer hair and gym shorts, but unmistakable.

When their eyes meet, Joey cheers. "You made it to high school, the worst four years of your life!"

Lucas looks back on the last two years and grimaces. "Shit, I hope not."

Joey claps a hand on his shoulder. "Only if you hang around with me." He grins before catching something in the corner of his eye and shrinking away from the contact. "Not that that's entirely exaggeration. If you're looking for a fresh chance at popularity, I am... not ideal."

He looks up at the three boys approaching and winces. "Hey, Ronnie," he says to the leader, taking off his glasses to clean them. As he does so, Lucas notices the ghost of an old bruise hugging the bone of his right eye socket.

"Kin!" Joey grits his teeth. "Missed you this summer! What'd you do the last few months, suck cock?"

His fingers ball into a fist and a pit grows in Lucas' stomach as Joey stares down the significantly taller boy. "No, actually, your dad sucked mine. Seems like he had practice, too." He flips Ronnie off as all three advance towards them, one hand behind him pushing Lucas back, pressing his glasses into the other boy's palm, and a whistle blows.

"Kim, detention!" All five boys whip around to meet the glare of the red-faced, middle-aged coach. "Keep your finger where it belongs and get in the gym, all of you!"

Joey groans as Lucas lets out a sigh of relief. As they pass the man in the gym doorway, Lucas says, "Coach, it wasn't Joey's fault–"

"Are you aiming for detention, too, Mr...?"

"Sinclair."

"Mr. Sinclair. I'm sure there's room for you."

"No, Coach."

He grins, teeth big and nostrils flared. Joey pulls Lucas through the door.

Joey rolls his eyes at the teacher's back and slumps onto the bleachers to tighten his laces. He squints at the knots, fingers fumbling.

Lucas brandishes his thick red glasses at him. "Would these help?"

Joey grabs them, hand slipping at his misjudgement of the distance and smudging a thumb print across the left lens. "Shit!" He groans and untucks his Hawkins High t-shirt to clean the heavy glass.

Lucas sits down beside him, watching the soft circles of Joey's fingers. "So," he breathes, "what was that about?"

He scoffs. "It's like Mike says. They're just mouthbreathers."

Lucas tries to formulate another question, tries to figure out what he even wants to ask, but before he figures it out, the whistle screams out again and class starts.

By the time the bell rings, they're all panting and sweating and they smell disgusting. As forty obnoxious teenagers funnel out the door, Lucas hangs back, trying to find Joey.

As the gaggle of boys approaches the locker room, Joey slides to the

back of the group. Lucas hurries to catch up and then slows to a stop beside him as the door clangs shut and the rabble is muted. Joey nods and continues on down the hallway.

Lucas calls after him, "Where are you going?"

He doesn't turn. "Bathroom."

"There's one in the locker room."

Joey throws an amused look over his shoulder. "There's also forty assholes and no adult supervision. I'm good. I can change in a stall."

"Come on, they can't be that bad."

Joey fixes him with a look. It hurts. There's no other way for Lucas to describe the anger and disappointment and pain crowding out of Joey's eyes.

"They very much can be that bad."

He doesn't have anything to say to that. Joey keeps walking, solitary footsteps loud in the empty hall.

"I'll see you at lunch?" Lucas calls after him. Joey turns one last time, rolling his eyes, but his cheeks hint of a smile.

"Sure."

Lucas watches him turn the corner and gulps before plodding back to the locker room, the bruise around Joey's eye twisting his stomach. He swings the door open to the chaos of teenage boyhood and tries to keep his head down.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

Joey reunites with the rest of the gang.

After an hour of science with a teacher much less engaging than Mr. Clark, Lucas carries his packed lunch into the crowded cafeteria. He scans the room for his friends, but surrounded by upperclassmen, Mike's height doesn't stick out, and Dustin already got scolded for wearing his baseball cap. With a truly ridiculous tumble of teenagers roughhousing and yelling, Lucas can't find anyone.

"Hey, Stalker!"

He sighs in relief, swinging towards the redheaded rocket aimed at him. Max jumps him, wrapping her arms around his neck with a velocity that leaves him tumbling backwards.

"Woah, is this an assassination?" He regains his balance and peels her off of him.

"Nah. I'm not totally homicidal yet. It's only lunchtime. You gonna stand there like a lost puppy forever, or do you want to come eat lunch?" She doesn't wait for an answer, just wraps her fingers around his wrist and yanks him into the maze of tables.

He nearly runs into three different people, but they make it to the half-empty table unscathed.

Mike waves at Lucas as he sits down, paying half attention to Dustin ranting about *Lord of the Rings*.

He pulls out a sandwich from his lunch bag and tunes into Dustin, who seems to be discussing Gimli's heritage. As he tries to remember the books he read three summers before, Max drums her hands on the table, startling Dustin into silence.

"Do any of you have Mr. Rockwell for math?"

They all shake their heads.

"I think Nancy did," Mike says, "but I don't think she liked him much. Does he suck?"

"I'm pretty sure the guy hates women. At first I thought he just wasn't calling on me, but I swear, he only called on two girls the entire period. What the fuck?"

"Oh yeah," comes that familiar voice from behind him, "guy's a total prick."

Max turns around and glares at Joey. "Have we met?"

"Joey!" Dustin and Mike chorus from across the table.

"Hey, Joey," Lucas says, trying to ignore the way his heart speeds up, patting the bench beside him, "meet Max Mayfield. Max, Joey Kim, proud alum of the Hawkins AV Club."

They size each other up for a long moment, red Coke bottle glasses against the bandaged chin of a skateboarding accident.

Eventually Max cedes. "Hey," she mutters, and nods towards the offered seat.

He takes it. "Where's Zombie Boy?" he asks, scanning the table.

The kids seem to exhale as one, struggling balloons losing a burst of helium.

"Will moved to California," Dustin says.

Joey's eyes crinkle, but he leaves his questions unasked. "Bogus. He was rad."

"*Super* bogus," Dustin agrees. "So, what's your problem with Rockwell?"

Joey opens a bag of chips and hums. "I think an easier question would be 'What isn't my problem with Rockwell?' Dude's a piece of shit. He chooses, like, three favorite students and ignores or belittles all the others. Plus, Max is right. Total misogynist. And probably racist, but he might just not like *me*."

Max groans. "And I'm stuck with him. What does this town have against me?"

Joey grins. "So, this is still the Hawkins Hates Us Club?"

"Only if it's also the We Hate Hawkins Club," Max grumbles.

"What are you guys," Dustin mumbles through a mouthful of bread, "the *Doom Patrol*?"

Lucas lights up. "Hey, I told you you'd like those!"

Dustin shrugs. "They're a little less fun when we don't have..." He trails off, eyeing Joey cautiously. "Never mind."

Joey rolls his eyes. "And we're back to this." He turns to Max. "Do you know what their 'ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies' bullshit is about?"

"They're friends with Carrie White," Max deadpans. "They're all super traumatized from her blowing up the prom."

Lucas elbows her and she laughs.

"Oh, yeah," Joey says, "and I spent the summer fighting Cujo." He leans around Lucas to give Max the stink eye. "You guys are weird."

"Come on," Max says, an edge of offense to her tone, "it was funny."

The table lulls into silence, Dustin and Lucas glaring at her between bites.

"So, Mike," Joey says when the awkwardness becomes unbearable, "you've been awfully quiet. What's up with you?"

Mike shrugs, eyes focusing on him if retaining their doleful glaze. "I just miss Will."

Dustin's grin conveys less than its usual carelessness. "Do you guys remember his high school bucket list? He made it in fourth grade, I think, just after I moved here, and it had all these things about getting prom dates and pranking the principal."

Lucas sighs. "That was when he still wanted to join the baseball team."

Dustin laughs. "Goddamn, Will couldn't hit a ball to save his life!"

Max throws a chip at him. "Neither can you, jerkwad."

"Remind me of that next time you fall off your skateboard."

"Hey, at least I can skateboard! You do any cool sports, Mr. Know-It-All? And signing up for Academic Decathlon doesn't count!"

Joey laughs as Dustin flicks a carrot across the table, missing her completely and hitting Lucas in the chest.

"Seriously, guys?" Lucas says, "Can you two chill out?"

"Come on, dude," Max says in her best surfer dude drawl, "it's *totally tubular*."

"You're a pain in the ass, Maxine."

Max sticks her tongue out at Lucas, now the subject of her mischief. "Don't make me break up with you again."

"You can't break up with me. We're not dating."

She pouts. "Lucas, my love, take me back! I promise I'll be better! We can be together again!"

Mike slumps forward onto the table. "If you do this whole 'ask Lucas to take you back for the express purpose of melodramatically breaking up with him' routine one more goddamn time, I'm going to puncture my eardrums."

Joey looks on intently. "You two dated?"

Lucas nods. He doesn't know why it drops a weight in his stomach as he watches for a reaction. Joey doesn't give one.

He just says, "Oh. Radical."

"What about you?" Dustin says, "You got a girlfriend?"

Lucas' eyes meet Joey's as if yanked magnetically. Joey's eyes are wide, jaw clenched, waiting for a strike.

When it doesn't come, he shakes his head and mutters, "Nah, man, no girlfriend."

Dustin shrugs. "Well, I–"

A round of groans cuts him off.

"If you say how pretty Suzie is *one more time,*" Max growls, "I will have your *spleen* on *toast*."

Dustin grimaces. "Jeez, I got it."

"Good!" Mike moans.

Dustin flips them off. "You guys are the worst, you know that?"

Everyone nods.

Notes for the Chapter:

> me? updating my literal least popular fic instead of anything else? it's more likely than you think.

3. Chapter 3

After spending the rest of the day telling himself he's not looking for Joey, Lucas finds him again by the bike rack after school.

Joey pulls his beat up red bike from between the metal bars, headphones plugged into a Walkman on his belt. His head bops to the faint tinny pop that barely reaches Lucas' ears.

"Joey!" Lucas calls, but he doesn't seem to hear him, lost in the music. "Hey, Joey!" He waves, despite being a full five feet away.

Joey's head snaps up. He squeaks and presses a button on his player, pulling his headphones around his neck. "Hi, sorry. Hi. I didn't hear you. Am I in your way?"

"No. I just," he blushes, not sure why, "We were gonna grab ice cream downtown after school. I thought maybe you'd want to come."

Joey fiddles with his glasses. "I didn't bring any money to school today."

Lucas shrugs. "No problem. I can spot you."

Joey nods. "Okay, thanks. That sounds fun."

"Tubular," Lucas agrees. He sits on one of the bars of the bike rack, ankles dangling. "So," he says into the awkward silence, "whatcha listening to?"

Joey clears his throat. "Madonna," he mumbles.

"Oh," Lucas says, failing to erase the subtext in his tone.

Joey frowns, inhaling for a rant. "You know, listening to Madonna doesn't mean you're gay. I *am* gay, but that has nothing to do with the music I listen to. I like Madonna because *Like a Virgin* is a fucking bop, not because I'm gay."

"Oh," Lucas repeats, no better response coming to mind, "Good."

Joey gives him a weird look. "Thanks? I mean, it shouldn't be that big a deal. I'm not a creep or anything. And I don't have AIDS."

"Is that why those jerks were–"

"Yeah." Joey studies his handlebars intently as he mutters, "Some asshole started a rumor and I wasn't going to give them the satisfaction of denying it. So most of the kids in school know." He glances up at Lucas and gulps. "I– I get it if that means you don't want to hang out with me."

Lucas lays his hand over Joey's. "No way, man. Just means you fit into the freak show."

Joey nods. "Tubular. If only we actually were friends with Carrie."

Lucas laughs, but it's laced with seriously missing Eleven. "Yeah, dude, if only."

"Anyway, the freaks are meeting in front of the library. Come on!"

He grabs his own bike and leads it around the campus, Joey in tow.

His friend, Joey.

His *gay* friend, Joey.

Weird.

But also totally tubular.